

BANGOR DAILY NEWS

Sappi cutting electricity usage with Efficiency Maine grant

By Christopher Cousins, BDN Staff

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SKOWHEGAN, Maine — Sappi Fine Paper's Somerset Mill in Skowhegan is set to drastically reduce its electricity consumption with the assistance of a \$300,000 grant from Efficiency Maine.

The grant, along with \$300,000 in Sappi funds, is being used to replace a pumping system at the Skowhegan mill's Number 3 paper machine. When complete, the project will save an estimated 3.2 million kilowatt hours annually, which is comparable to the yearly electricity usage of 300 average homes, according to Sappi spokeswoman Amy Olson.

The project, which is already underway, is being done in conjunction with a routine maintenance process, meaning scheduled paper production at the mill will not be interrupted. Ten fixed-speed pumps that feed the paper-making machine with wood fiber and water will be replaced with variable-speed pumps which can be adjusted to match production needs. In the current setup, the pumps are on full speed all the time and flow is adjusted with the use of valves.

"The paper industry is a very capital-intensive industry, where continuous improvement is critical to a company's ability to operate sustainably," said John Donahue, vice president of manufacturing for Sappi Fine Paper North American. "This project is one of many initiatives through which we are working to reduce our company's carbon footprint."

According to Olson, 87 percent of the Skowhegan mill's total energy in 2010 came from on-site electricity generation plants fueled by biomass, which is a mix of burnable materials collected from forests.

The Sappi project was one of 18 projects supported by Efficiency Maine in its most recent round of commercial funding. The program, which is funded with federal stimulus money and proceeds from the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, distributed \$4.3 million among the 18 projects, leveraging many times that from other sources. Other grant winners in the round included state universities and government buildings as well as several of Maine's largest businesses, such as General Dynamics, Twin Rivers Paper, Irving Forest Products, The Jackson Laboratory, Madison Paper Industries, Moose River Lumber, Stonyvale Farms and the Mt. Abram ski resort.

Among the 18 projects were nine designed specifically to save energy. Ian Burnes, a spokesman for Efficiency Maine, said this round of electrical use reduction grants will save an estimated 33 million kilowatt hours a year, which is enough energy to power 28,000 average homes that use 1,000 kilowatt hours per month. The grants were announced in August 2010, but many of them are just now coming to fruition. To date Efficiency Maine has granted \$14.5 million through its "Large Projects" program, which has leveraged \$76 million from other sources. The organization also administers a program that targets the residential sector.

Burnes said he did not know how much money will be available in the future because of uncertainty surrounding the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, in which Maine and nine other states participate. The initiative caps electricity usage and sells carbon credits to businesses and manufacturers. The proceeds fund programs such as Efficiency Maine.

"Funding for the future will be dependent on the proceeds from the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative," said Burnes. "That's a market-based initiative. The market is uncertain. Emissions are down so revenues are down."

Burnes said Efficiency Maine will wait until it has amassed a few million dollars before awarding another round of large project grants.

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